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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAL JO

SUBJECT: FURTHER MA'AN VIOLENCE, OTHER INCIDENTS, RATTLE

JORDANIANS

REF: (A) AMMAN 6823 (B) AMMAN 6535 (C) AMMAN 6650

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

MORE VIOLENCE IN MA'AN . . .

¶11. (C) The southern city of Ma'an was again the site of a clash between police and local armed militants on November ¶24. According to press reports, one 22 year old man was killed in the exchange of gunfire, and three others, including one policeman, were injured. The circumstances of the clash are unclear, and three separate stories have emerged.

¶12. (C) Government-controlled Jordan Radio reported November 24 that a number of persons had attacked and fired on Public Security Directorate (PSD) patrols in the city. The PSD then tried to disperse the attackers, an exchange of fire occurred, with one killed and three injured. Doha-based Al-Jazeera satellite television, by contrast, reported the same day that the exchange of fire occurred after the PSD attempted to detain Sayyaf, son of Islamic militant leader Mohammed Shalibi (aka Abu Sayyaf). Sources at PSD have offered a third version: that a Ma'an youth had been shooting off firecrackers, a crowd gathered and when the PSD attempted to disperse them the exchange of fire broke out. Finally, a press source informally passed onto CAO a fourth version that involves Ma'an youths throwing stones at the PSD patrol prior to the shoot-out.

¶13. (C) Whichever version (if any) is accurate, it appears that the situation in Ma'an, although still tense, has subsided, at least for now. On November 26, the GOJ announced that a curfew that had been imposed on the city in the immediate aftermath of the November 24 shoot-out had been lifted and that security forces had disappeared from the streets. PSD APCs that had been withdrawn from around the Embassy prior to the previous Ma'an operation were back in place November 27.

. . . AND INCIDENTS ELSEWHERE

¶14. (C) The latest violence in Ma'an comes amidst reports of other apparently unconnected incidents in the Kingdom that have rattled Jordanians' nerves. During the week of November 18-23, some type of violence took place in the Jordan Valley town of South Shuneh. The GOJ supervisor on the Jordanian side of the Allenby bridge told Refcoord that a feud between two Shuneh families had erupted into gunfire. The PSD, he assured her, had contained the situation and was in the process of rounding up weapons in the town. On November 24, a hand grenade exploded in front of one of the Amman branches of Arab Bank, the largest Bank in Jordan. No one was injured. Until now, no group has claimed responsibility for this act and its motive remains unknown.

COMMENT: JORDANIANS ON EDGE

¶15. (C) These events -- coming a month after the assassination of USAID official Larry Foley and concurrent with the announcement of authorized departure for Embassy Amman -- have gotten a great deal more attention than they would have in calmer circumstances. Amman's salons are consequently, peppered with conversations asking whether Jordan's position as "an island of sanity" in an unstable region may be at risk. Many fear that the string of recent incidents, even if unconnected, could be the beginning of a worrisome trend.

GNEHM